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US top court wrestles with final health law hearings

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Supreme Court justices battled Wednesday over the fate of US President Barack Obama's health care reforms, with liberals fighting to salvage the rest of the law if a key provision is declared unconstitutional.

The court's conservative wing questioned whether the law could survive if it is stripped of its key plank -- that all Americans must buy insurance. But they also wrestled with whether it should be struck down in its entirety.

The liberal justices argued that that was a matter for the Congress, rather than the top court, to decide.

"Why should we involve the court in making a legislative judgment?" Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked Paul Clement, the lawyer representing 26 states who said the law should be struck down in its entirety.

Sotomayor contended it might be better to let Congress fix the law.

"If we strike down one provision, we're not taking that power away from Congress. Congress could look at it without the mandatory coverage provision and say this model

doesn't work, let's start from the beginning," she said.

Clement responded that the requirement to buy health care was too tightly intertwined with other core provisions of the law to be separated, and that without it, the law would become "a hollow shell."

The justices are not expected to rule on the law before June, meaning that the potentially explosive decision is likely to land right in the thick of the heated presidential campaign.

The health care law -- Obama's signature domestic achievement -- encompasses the most ambitious reform of the troubled US health care system in decades, seeking to extend health insurance to 32 million Americans who now lack it.

But since it was signed into law in 2010, the reform has divided public opinion and emerged as a major issue in the presidential campaign, attacked by Republicans as an assault on individual liberties.

Polls show weak public support for the law, with one tracking poll showing that only one in three Americans currently support the individual mandate.

Hand across the ocean-Aruba Meets Europe Annual Conference



This week, Aruba's tourism executives have welcomed travel partners from Europe for their annual update on Aruba as a destination, examining every aspect of their promotion of Aruba, from financial outlook to improvement of the product.

Official opening ceremonies took place yesterday morning in the Palm Beach Ballroom of the Westin Aruba Resort, after delegates were treated to a sumptuous buffet breakfast in the hotel's art gallery. Acting host for the morning was Tirso Tromp, ATA's European Manager. This year, AME counted 40 travel executives attending, demonstrating their interest and support in Aruba as a prime destination.

Officially welcoming the delegates was the CEO of the Aruba Tourism Authority, (ATA,) Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes, who regaled the gathering with statistical information regarding growth in the European market, plus the island's plans for further stimulating interest among European travelers. A basic

strategy is continual investment in the product, particularly aimed at enhancing the experience of visitors, and continued investment in marketing, with a particular focus on the European markets. This plan was supported by comments of the CEO of the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association, Jim Hepple. Numbers show that 9% of Aruba's visitors are from European countries, but they account for 13% of the income from resorts, indicating they stay on island for longer periods.

Last year, Aruba had 1,471,289 tourist arrivals. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO) their studies show that of the top ten countries where residents travel internationally for vacations, four are in Europe; Germany being the #1 nation, spends \$78 billion on international travel annually, Britain, France and Italy trailing a bit behind. "Clearly, Europe is a very important source market for international visitors," concluded Mr. Hepple.

Continued on pg 2



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ELMAR supports this year's event **Aruba unites this** **year again to observe** **"Earth Hour"**

On Saturday, March 31st at 8:30 pm millions of people in more than 135 countries around the world will unite to celebrate and contemplate about our planet by turning off their lights for one hour. The event is called "Earth Hour." In uniting to turn off all lights we are symbolically committing ourselves to taking action to benefit our planet for future generations.

The Earth Hour Aruba Community Group (EHACG) was founded in 2011 with the objective of encouraging the government, businesses, hotels, organizations and especially the community at large to participate in this global event. EHACG is very appreciative of the future of our planet and are committed to help with an awareness endeavor. They are also committed to working together on keeping Aruba clean, promoting agriculture and in the implementation of alternative energy on Aruba.

For this year's event, ELMAR NV has decided to patronize the organizers of

this event in their quest to make the community aware about caring for our planet. ELMAR, the local electricity distributor is already working on various projects, such as alternative energy using solar panels to help reduce the dependence and cost of conventional electricity.

By switching off all lights on public buildings and in private homes and businesses, we will be demonstrating our commitment to working towards a positive planet. Earth Hour also offers the opportunity for our citizens to create discussion groups regarding ideas and plans on how our community can take action to solve some of our environmental problems.

Earth Hour began back in 2007 in a single city -Sydney, Australia. Since then the idea has spread and has become a global movement where millions are creating a massive event never before witnessed in history with respect to our environment.

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Hand across the ocean-Aruba Meets Europe Annual Conference **Continued from pg 1**



Jim Hepple, Ronella Tjin Asjoe Croes and Jossy Lacle

Aruba's Minister of Tourism, Transport & Labor, Otmar Oduber, then officially welcome the European delegation. He explained the effort

many projects and improvement to island infrastructure now taking place, with particular focus on Oranjestad and San Nicolas going through a



Aruba's Prime Minister Mike Eman



Peter Steinmetz of Airport Authority

beautification

experience the quality of food and entertainment available here.

The CEO of the Aruba Airport Authority, Peter Steinmetz, detailed the upgrading and beautification of the Reina Beatrix International Airport, the goal being to offer visitors an exceptional experience and connection to the island from the moment

This morning Aruba Meets Europe 2012 continues with the traditional marketplace at the Radisson Resort for networking and updating on services and accommodations offered on Aruba.

By Rosalie Klein



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ELMAR supports this year's event... (continued from pg 2)



Some of the world's greatest architectural structures, to mention: China's Forbidden City, Eiffel Tower, Table Mountain, Great Pyramids of Egypt, Buckingham Palace,

Brazil's statue of Christ the Redeemer, Niagara Falls, Empire State Building, and Sydney Opera House, are only a few of the famous icons that will switch off into



total darkness for one hour to show the power that we have to take control of changing our global climate.

This year's Earth Hour promises to be even bigger than 2011. See how big it will be by visiting www.youtube.com/earthhour and watch the 2012 Earth hour video

The organizers here on Aruba hope that Arubans will show their support by turning

off the lights at their homes during the one hour on March 31st, from 8:30 to 9:30pm.

Everyone on Aruba is also invited to attend the special ceremony to switch off the lights at the Willem III Tower in Oranjestad at 8:30 pm. everyone should arrive there at 8:00pm.

This year's global campaign is dubbed, "I Will If You will." This is the kind of chal-

lenge we can use to get others involved in the one hour observance of Earth Hour.

EHACG intends to create a type of contest for an official song for Earth Hour Aruba Community Group. More details on this will be forthcoming on their Face Book page: <https://www.facebook.com/arubaearthhour>.

Visit EHACG's website www.earthhour.org.

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Aruba now has innovative weight reduction Hypnosis program!

Overweight is a growing and serious problem on Aruba and many overweight citizens have been struggling with their overweight problems unsuccessfully for many years.

Most people draw the conclusion that Diet Programs do not work! Many overweight individuals will tell us that they have tried numerous dieting methods, and some have resulted in them losing some weight, but after not very long their weight increases again...and even faster than before!

They go through the so-called yoyo effect...down and then up and down and then up again!

The Aruba Hypnosis Center apparently has the answer! They claim that hypnosis is the alternative, that it is comfortable and safe to reduce weight permanently and in a responsible manner. The Aruba Hypnosis Center reports that they are ready to

start a "Hypnosis for Weight Management" program.

They will offer a one night information session that will explain exactly how hypnosis could help people achieve their weight loss goals. The program of the Center was originated in the USA and thousands have already successfully lost weight.

The accompanying photo shows Candice Richter who reportedly lost 55 pounds in 5 months thru the Hypnosis Management Program. She said, she went from a size 16 to 4 and feels fantastic!

They claim that results do vary based on personal individual motivation but that the results are simply fantastic. In Aruba, already several individuals have tried the program and are raving with positive results. Velma Daal is one of the Arubans who participated and experienced great results. Velma says: "This weight management program taught me how to eat better and taught me that exercise is utmost important...I went on a cruise vacation and did not increase any weight whatsoever. Because I know what and how to eat it was very easy." An other



Candice Richter
A baha 55 liber!

them from smoking, for losing weight and for other aspects to improve their quality of life. Obviously, according to the experts, hypnosis results will vary based on the experience, competency and systems used by individual hypnotherapists.

Who can participate?

You have tried many ways to reduce weight.

Your diet plan does not work and it has tired you out. Are you ready to take the next step to real results? Are you ready to make the change in your life that you truly deserve? Then, it is believed that the Aruba Hypnosis Weight Management Program will work for you, according to the promoters of this innovative program.

The program reportedly, will teach people the art of self-hypnosis that will enable them to make fantastic changes in their lives. They believe that self-hypnosis will enable people to focus on the things they want in life and not on those things they do not desire.

Eddy Oduber is the person behind this great program. Eddy Oduber is a certified hypnotherapist. He is certified

by the National Guild of American Hypnotists. Eddy Oduber is a hypnotherapist recognized by various international organizations. For almost 6 years he has been helping people break the habit of smoking through hypnotherapy. A large group of persons have also attended his very successful weight loss program using hypnotherapy.

The information evening is scheduled to take place today at the Aruba Hypnosis Center from 8:00 to 9:00pm. The space for the gathering is limited, hence those interested in attending should send an email to receive confirmation. The email address is: hypnosis@arubanet.com. More details and information about the meeting will be supplied in a return email.

Feel free to call the Aruba Hypnosis Center N.V. at Tel. 583-9026, or email: hypnosis@arubanet.com.

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'My cat is safe', Medvedev assures Russia

MOSCOW (AFP) - Setting aside fears for a new arms race with the United States or the conflict in Syria, President Dmitry Medvedev took to Twitter Wednesday to reassure Russia on another burning issue -- the wellbeing of his cat.

Presidential pet Dorofey had not, contrary to press reports and frenzied Internet speculation, gone missing.

"It has become known from sources close to Dorofey that he didn't disappear. Thank you for your concern,



everyone," tweeted Medvedev.

Russian social media users have been having a field day speculating about the cat's

alleged escape, with at least two Twitter accounts created in Dorofey's name to post updates of his whereabouts and his decision to join the nas-

cent protest movement.

The cat's name -- derived from Greek Dorotheos, or the 'gift of God' -- soared to global Twitter trends as bloggers joked the animal had fled ahead of his owner's departure from the Kremlin in May.

"The story of Dorofey's disappearance is rubbish, just as the story of the attempt on Putin's life," wrote popular blogger @davidmsk, referring to a reported pre-election plot against the Russian leader.

"It's meant to bring out

**Don't miss the
Caribbean
Festival
this coming
Thursday**



SAN NICOLAS -- Every Thursday evening, islanders flock to San Nicolas to enjoy the fabulous bargains and entertainment of the Caribbean Festival, a mix of Aruban and Caribbean traditions kept alive by the multi-cultural make up of Aruba's "Sunrise City."

Originally populated by the thousands that came from all over the Caribbean to work at the refinery, the town has savored and preserved the food, music and dance that many brought with them from their various regions. The festival revels in the diverse background of San Nicolas, offering unique dishes and beverages, along with a full evening of island entertainment.

This week, organ grinder 'Nos Cultura' specializing in folkloric music opens the show from 6:30 to 8:00 PM. A full roster of some of Aruba's finest criollo entertainers follows including dance groups 'The Superdancers' and 'Youth in Action,' Jersey Sofia, and Carnival show by Carna-Aruba end the evening, and this is only on the main stage!

Scattered throughout the main street of San Nicolas are performance areas surround by seating where you can settle in with an island snack or dinner, including steelpan music by Steelpan man Angel Hazel and TBS Brassband

Island visitors can enjoy the Caribbean festival as part of a complete package available at all De Palm and concierge desks, which include transportation. You can customize your evening by purchasing with or without food and refreshments. A variety of local handicrafts are offered for sale and the event guarantees a good time for all, with an authentic introduction to the island experience.

International News

US pilot charged over mid-flight meltdown

LAS VEGAS (AFP) - A US pilot has been charged with interfering with a flight crew after a dramatic mid-flight breakdown in which he screamed about terrorists and 9/11, officials said Wednesday.

Clayton Osbon, 49, had to be restrained by a number of male passengers after Tuesday's incident, in which a JetBlue plane from New York to Las Vegas made an emergency landing in Amarillo, Texas.

The first officer then "declared an emergency and diverted the aircraft to Amarillo, landing with passengers still restraining Osbon," said the document cited by US Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Sarah R. Saldana.

Footage filmed with cell

phone cameras and broadcast on US television showed chaos at the front of the plane, as male passengers scrambled to help restrain the pilot, who could be heard shouting hysterically.

Between four and six passengers had to sit on him for up to 20 minutes as the plane, which was three and a half hours into its flight, made an emergency landing, witnesses said.

According to the affidavit, the pilot, who had shown no previous sign of mental problems, had arrived late for the flight, and began behaving erratically soon after the plane took off from New York's Kennedy airport.

The first officer became

particularly concerned when Osbon said "things just don't matter," and "yelled over the radio to air traffic control and instructed them to be quiet," according to the affidavit.

JetBlue's chief executive Dave Barger paid tribute to the quick-thinking first officer, as well as the passengers who helped pin the captain down.

"That was a tough situation at altitude. The customers, the crew, just did a great job," he told NBC television's "Today Show" program. "That was a true team effort at 35,000 feet (10,000 kilometers) yesterday."

"I've known the captain personally for a long period of time. There's been no indication of this at all in the past," Barger said.

US judge set to decide on Strauss-Kahn sex case

NEW YORK (AFP) - The fate of a New York maid's lawsuit alleging sexual assault by Dominique Strauss-Kahn rested in the hands of a US judge Wednesday after the French politician's lawyers claimed he had diplomatic immunity.

Judge Douglas McKeon said he would rule quickly following a 90-minute hearing in a Bronx courthouse where a Strauss-Kahn attorney argued that the disgraced former head of the IMF had "the same kind of diplomatic immunity that other high-ranking officials and diplomats enjoy."

A lawyer for Nafissatou Diallo, the Manhattan hotel maid whose accusation of sexual assault triggered the spectacular downfall of a man tapped to be the next French president, ridiculed the notion of dismissal.

Strauss-Kahn, who was managing director of the International Monetary Fund at the time, admits consensual sex took place with Diallo in his luxury Sofitel suite, but denies assault. New York prosecutors initially charged him, but then dismissed the case because of concerns over the maid's credibility.

Strauss-Kahn had some level of immunity. However, a key sticking point appears to be whether that only extended to him in his official duties.

The judge did not rule in court, but promised "to expeditiously issue a decision."

Neither Strauss-Kahn, who is simultaneously facing charges in France over an international prostitution network, nor Diallo, were present in the wood-paneled courtroom. Several dozen journal-

ists, many of them from France, attended.

Unless Strauss-Kahn decides to pay Diallo an out-of-court financial settlement, Wednesday's arguments could prove to be only the first salvo of a drawn-out and bitter legal battle.

Allegations in the civil suit are much the same as the criminal charges initially lodged against Strauss-Kahn: that Diallo went to clean his luxury hotel suite and found herself being chased, then assaulted by its naked occupant.

If Diallo won her civil trial, Strauss-Kahn could then be ordered to pay her financial compensation.

As from the beginning of the scandal last year, Taylor insisted that Diallo's only motivation in accusing the wealthy Frenchman is financial

US police had sought to arrest guard who shot teen: report



MIAMI (AFP) - Police in Florida initially sought an arrest warrant for the neighborhood watch guard who shot and killed unarmed black teen Trayvon Martin, but were overruled by prosecutors, media reports said Wednesday.

The Miami Herald said police in Sanford, Florida applied for the arrest warrant in the early stages of the investigation, contrary to suggestions that there had been inadequate probable cause for a prosecution.

The daily cited a police incident report that described the shooting of the 17-year-old by neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman as "homicide/negligent manslaughter."

Prosecutors however, held off approving the warrant, pending further review, according to the Herald and other media reports.

Martin, a high school student, was fatally shot on February 26 by Zimmerman, a white Hispanic who said he acted in self-defense.

The case has unleashed a national uproar and reopened old wounds over race relations in the United States.

A controversial Florida law allows the use of deadly force when a person senses a reasonable fear of death or serious in-

jury, which Zimmerman, through surrogates interviewed in the media, has said was the case when he shot Trayvon.

Since the teen's death, there have been numerous large public protests calling for Zimmerman's arrest, but the 28-year-old has not been detained, prompting outrage from rights groups which describe the shooting as a case of racial profiling and decry what they allege are racial inequalities in the US criminal justice system.

Special prosecutor Angela Corey told the Miami Herald that police filed a "capias request" to the state attorney, a recommendation that criminal charges be made.

Chris Serino, the lead detective on the case, meanwhile told ABC News on Tuesday that he filed an affidavit on the night of the shooting stating that he was unconvinced about Zimmerman's version of events.

Serino separately told MSNBC that he was not at liberty to discuss the case, but felt encouraged by the new investigation into the shooting, and he was "looking forward to the truth coming out."

Martin's mother, however, told CNN on Wednesday that she thought authorities were properly probing the circumstances of the shooting.

Martin's parents meanwhile took their case to Capitol Hill to fight for justice.

Meanwhile a US lawmaker who wore a hooded jacket to the House of Representatives Wednesday to commemorate the shooting death of a black Florida teenager was rebuked for defying the dress code.

Bobby Rush, an Illinois Democrat, was told to remove the hood on his jacket or leave the Chamber where he was speaking.

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French gunman's father to sue police over his death

ALGIERS (AFP) - The father of Mohamed Merah, the Islamist gunman who killed seven people in southern France, has hired an Algerian lawyer to sue a crack French police unit over his son's death, the lawyer told AFP Wednesday.

Algerian authorities have reportedly not yet agreed to a family request that Merah be

buried in the north African country.

Mokhtari explained that a convention signed between France and Algeria authorises lawyers to pursue cases in both countries.

Zair Mokhtari is a well-known lawyer in Algeria, notably for having won a 2005 case in a German court on behalf of an Algerian man,

Ibrahim Badaoui, who was accused of belonging to Al-Qaeda.

Mohamed Merah, a 23-year-old Frenchman of Algerian descent, was killed by police on March 22 after a lengthy stand-off at his Toulouse apartment.

When police surrounded Merah's Toulouse apartment last week, the gunman fought off an initial assault and then, in

a conversation with a police negotiator, claimed responsibility for the attacks.

He said he shot dead three soldiers in two separate attacks in Toulouse and nearby Montauban on March 11 and 15, then last Monday opened fire at a Jewish school in Toulouse, killing a 30-year-old teacher, his sons aged five and four, and a seven-year-old girl.

Italy seizes \$1.5 billion of Kadhafi family assets

ROME (AFP) - Italy on Wednesday seized more than 1.1 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) of assets controlled by the Libyan dictator Moamer Kadhafi's family including stakes in top companies, land and a Harley Davidson.

The seizure by tax police officers followed a request by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which is seeking the extradition from Libya of Kadhafi's son Seif al-Islam on charges of crimes against humanity.

Among the assets held by Libyan sovereign wealth funds was a 1.256-percent stake in the nation's largest bank UniCredit worth 611 million euros and a 0.58-percent stake in oil major ENI, the top foreign energy producer in Libya.

Under Kadhafi, Libya briefly held the biggest single stake in UniCredit.

There was also a 2.0-percent stake of Italian aerospace and defence giant Finmeccanica worth 40 million euros and a 0.33-percent stake in carmaker Fiat and truck maker Fiat Industrial worth an estimated 53 million euros.

Police said they further confiscated stock in Serie A football club Juventus where one of Kadhafi's sons -- football-mad Saadi who is now hiding in Niger -- used to be on the board and an apartment in one of Rome's most exclusive areas.

The seizures included 150 hectares (371 acres) of forest on Pantelleria, a picturesque Italian island halfway between Sicily and the Tunisian coast where the Libyan strongman was rumoured to be planning to build a holiday village.

A rogatory commission at the ICC requested the assets be seized in the context of its investigation into Kadhafi's son and his former intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi, also a brother-in-law to the fallen Libyan strongman.

The legal framework for the seizures also includes European Union rulings.

The assets -- a business empire built up by Kadhafi starting in the 1970s -- had already been frozen in the wake of the start of the Libyan rebellion last year and police said it took time to work out the exact owners of the funds.

Kadhafi and former Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi signed a "friendship treaty" in 2008 which led to a sharp rise in investments between the two countries, while Italy also undertook to pay compensation for colonial times.

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Health & Living

US man gets 'most extensive' face transplant ever



WASHINGTON (AFP) - A US man who lost his lips, nose and teeth in a 1997 gun accident has received the most extensive face transplant to date, according to doctors at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

Richard Lee Norris, 37, had undergone several life-saving and reconstructive surgeries after the accident but had limited use of his mouth and, before the surgery, appeared as though his lower face and nose had been mashed in.

In a 36-hour operation on March 19-20, doctors at the

US medical center carried out "the most extensive full face transplant completed to date, including both jaws, teeth, and tongue," the center said.

"The transplant included all facial soft tissue from the scalp to the neck, including the underlying muscles to enable facial expression, and sensory and motor nerves to restore feeling and function," chief plastic surgeon Eduardo Rodriguez said in a statement.

"Our goal is to restore function as well as have aesthetically pleasing results," he added.

Norris had spent the past 15 years living as a recluse, wearing a surgical mask and only shopping at night in order to avoid the staring of others, according to a report by MSNBC.

The world's first full face transplant took place in Spain, with doctors at Vall d'Hebron hospital in Barcelona showing off their work in July 2010.

The first successful partial face transplant was performed in France in 2005 on Isabelle Dinoire, a 38-year-old woman who had been mauled by her dog.

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Liberia journalist in hiding after genital mutilation expose

MONROVIA (AFP) - A Liberian journalist says she has been forced into hiding after lifting the lid on initiation rituals, including genital mutilation, by a secretive women's society.

Mae Azango, a reporter with Liberian daily Front Page Africa, published a story on March 8 in which a woman recounted how when she was a child she was held down and had her clitoris sliced off by members of the Sande Society.

The society is an initiation school where women and girls are sent to be circumcised and groomed to be prepared for marriage, as culture and tradition demand in the west African state, Azango wrote.

Azango's story was illustrated with pictures of initiated teenage girls emerging from the bush.

Azango said the punishment for exposing the secrets of the women's initiation society was to be forced to undergo the ritual "whether you like it or not".

International media organisations and NGOs have called on government to step in, a difficult task for the regime as courts have no say in the matter.

The powerful secret societies, called Poro for men and Sande for women, are spread throughout west Africa.

Girls taking part are bound to secrecy about what takes place during the initiation, making speaking about the societies extremely difficult.

The woman in Azango's article, now aged 47, was forced to undergo initiation at 13 because of a crime committed by her mother in 1976.

Azango reported that 10 of Liberia's 16 tribes practice female circumcision.

The World Health Organisation estimates that some 92 million girls aged 10 and above in Africa have undergone FGM, which can involve partial or total removal of the genitalia for various cultural, religious and social reasons.

Many countries have banned the practice but not Liberia.

Sci-Tech

Apple offers to refund Australian iPad customers

(AFP) - Apple Wednesday offered to refund Australian customers who felt misled by advertising about the 4G capability of its new iPad, which can only access the ultra-fast wireless network in North America.

Apple's problems in Australia could have wider repercussions in markets where the US company also advertises the iPad as featuring 4G, despite those countries having an incompatible network, or no 4G networks yet.

In those markets the new iPad reverts to a slower 3G speed, although that does not appear to have dented robust sales of the third-generation tablet computer outside North America.

Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission has taken Apple to the Federal Court for false advertising over its "iPad with WiFi + 4G" promotion, because the popular device does not work on the local 4G frequency.

The US tech giant's lawyers said Apple was prepared to publish a clarification about the tablet's Australian capabil-

ities, and refund any customers who felt they had been misled by the 4G reference.

Apple announced last week that it had sold three million iPads in its first weekend on the market after the new model went on sale in North America and selected foreign markets on March 16 -- the strongest iPad launch yet.

It has adopted the "4G LTE" standard prevalent in the United States, promising unrivalled wireless speeds. But markets including Japan have a different standard for 4G, while some such as Britain do not yet have 4G.

According to reports in the technology media, the European Union's executive commission could follow Australia's lead in taking action against Apple over the 4G marketing.

The latest case is not the first time Apple's technology has landed in Australia's courts.

The firm is locked in a legal battle with rival Samsung over tablet patents, part of a wider global tussle over supremacy of the US\$100 billion market.

Chinese buy paper iPads for ancestor worship



BEIJING (AFP) - Paper replicas of Apple's iPad and iPhone are selling like hot cakes in China this year as millions prepare to honour their ancestors in an age-old annual festival that has taken on a modern twist.

Tomb Sweeping Day, which falls on April 4 this year, sees families remember their ancestors by laying out food at their grave sites and burning paper replicas of daily necessities such as clothes, money, cars and houses.

The tradition -- which dates back thousands of years -- dictates that the paper goods can be used by their ancestors in the afterlife, and the offerings have evolved to fit in with modern life.

As such, paper replicas of iPhones and iPads -- which are hugely popular in China -- have become all the rage.

"The paper iPhones and iPads sold are the same size as the real ones with a whole complete package of components like headphones," an online retailer known by his surname, Tang, told AFP.

Another online retailer, who did not want to be named, also told AFP there has been an increase in orders for iPhone paper replicas ahead of the festival next week.

Retailers said a paper iPad sells for 538 yuan (\$85) including delivery while an iPhone version costs around 22 yuan.

Apple products are extremely popular in China where people queue for hours to get their hands on the latest devices.

Tomb Sweeping day -- or Qing Ming -- is also widely celebrated by ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, where most of them consider it an important occasion to pay respect to their ancestors.

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Energy-starved Pakistan eyes solar power



Pakistani company employees arrange solar panels for a marketing demonstration

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - From mosques, to homes and streets, Pakistanis are increasingly seeing the light and realising that year-round sun may be a cheap if partial answer to an enormous energy crisis. Pakistan needs to produce 16,000 megawatts of electricity a day but only manages 13,000 megawatts, according to the Pakistan Electric Power Company.

The shortfall means that

millions endure electricity cuts for up to 16 hours a day, leaving them freezing in winter and sweltering in summer while hitting industry hard, exacerbating a slow-burn recession.

"I think all our friends are encouraged to understand the real energy crisis that is in Pakistan. We can't afford to be selective of where we receive our energy supply from," Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar said this month.

At the time, she was referring to Pakistan's determination to build a pipeline and import gas from Iran, regardless of US threats of sanctions, but the message was clear: on the energy front, Pakistan needs any help it can get.

Arif Allaudin, who heads the Alternate Energy Development Board, would like to see more of that help coming from renewable sources, saying

there was a 2.4 million megawatt potential for solar energy alone in Pakistan.

Niaz Ahmed Kathia, director of private company Alternate Energy Systems, said abundant and free sunshine was the answer to Pakistan's energy woes.

"Energy is our biggest issue, more than terrorism, and if we replace our one million tubewell pumps with solar ones, we can save 7,000 megawatts," Kathia told AFP at the demonstration of a solar well in the capital.

The majority of Pakistan's tubewell pumps, which pump out underground water, run on the strained national grid or on diesel power.

There is no pretence that solar power is the only answer.

Power generated during sunlight hours can be stored in deep cycle lead acid batteries to power lights, radios, televisions and fans at night.

COMICS

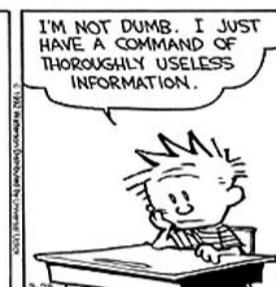
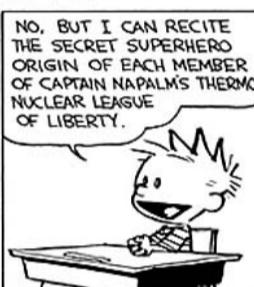
PICKLES



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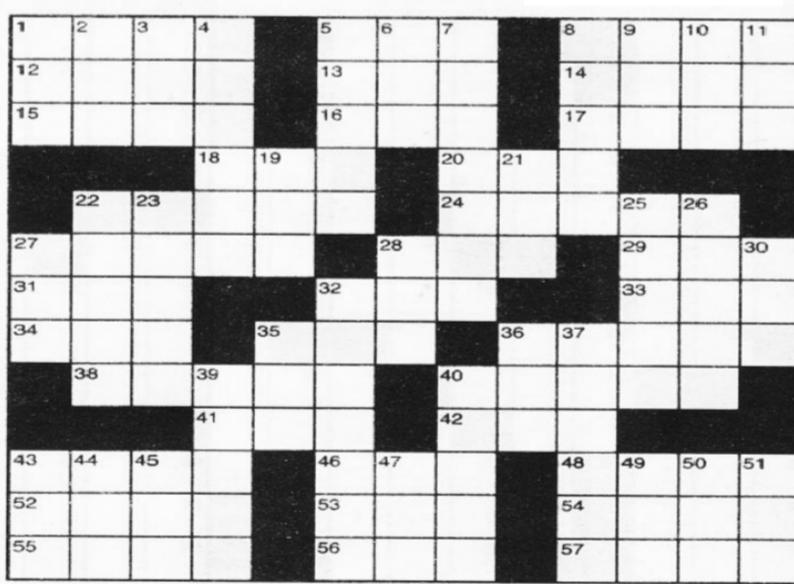
- Foreboding utterance (hyph.)
- Lackland, for one (abbr.)
- Army transport
- Positive
- Despair
- Robert ___ (2 wds.)
- Dr. or lbs., e.g..
- Chopping instrument
- "___ in Cincinnati"
- "Me," in Paris
- Feminine pronoun
- Sheep's sound
- Joins metal
- Champagne salute
- "___ overboard!"
- Actor McKellen
- Parts of ft.
- Office's ___ machine
- A Gabor sister
- Go downhill
- Shepherd's ___
- Group of eight musicians
- Yarn bundle
- Intersect
- Mutt, to Jeff
- From ___ Z (2 wds.)
- Tropical fruit
- Rainy mo.
- Small weight
- Newsman

Sevareid

- Modern (prefix)
- Verdi opera
- Stifles
- Beaver construction
- Neighbor of Ariz.
- Cable network
- Center of operations
- Spherical body
- Messenger of the Greek gods
- Expect
- trot
- substance
- Ruby, e.g.
- Large deer
- Always, in poems
- Brisk energy
- Grain morsel
- Egg layer
- Hits on the head, slangily
- Corrective eye surgery acronym
- Food regimens
- Conserves
- It is, poetically
- West of Hollywood

30. Natalie Cole's father

- Helsinki's locale
- Actress Zadora
- Leftover scrap
- Child-actor Jackie
- Heroic stories
- Billiards shot
- Beer holder
- Novelist Levin
- False hair
- "The Princess and the ___"
- Outer edge
- Summer beverage
- Utmost, informally



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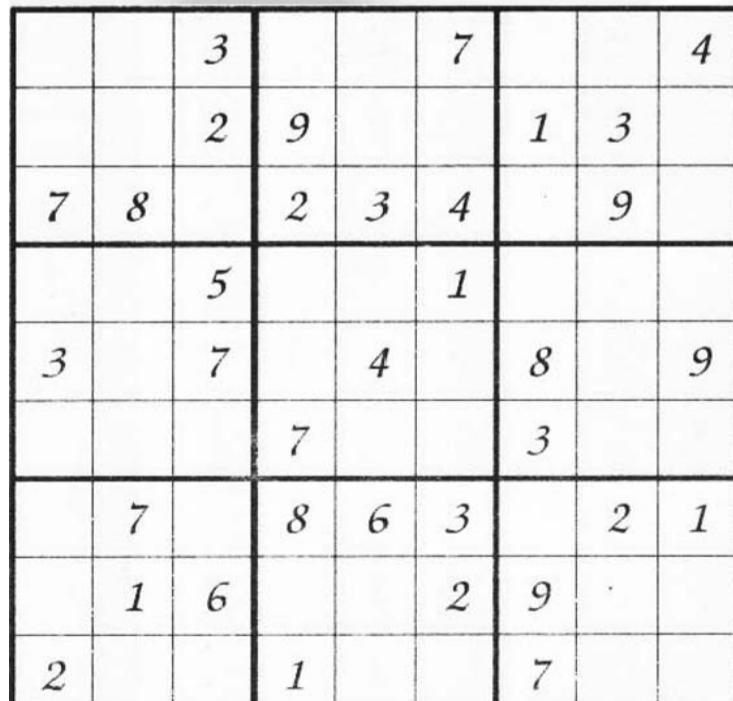
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SOLUTION



Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9
A number is Never repeated in a row or column.
In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9



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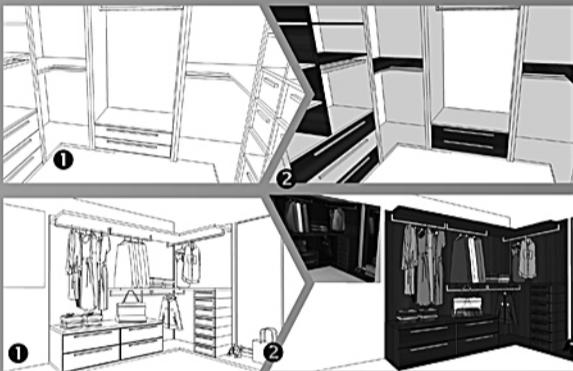
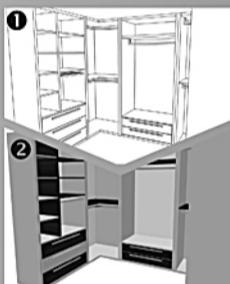
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Finance

Big business sees US economy pick-up: survey - Poll

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Leading US businesses see more momentum in the economic recovery and an increasing number plan to hire, despite recession fears in Europe, a closely watched association said Wednesday.

The Business Roundtable, a group of chief executives of companies with combined annual revenues of over \$6 trillion, said its latest survey of CEOs showed growing expectations for sales, business investment and hiring for the next six months.

The group's index, which every quarter measures CEO outlooks on the economy, leaped between January and March, reaching 96.9 points versus 77.9 points in the final

quarter of 2011.

The huge improvement in the survey "is one of the better moves" since the series began in 2002 and marked the third straight quarterly gain, said James McNerney, chairman of the Business Roundtable and chairman, president and CEO of The Boeing Company, in a conference call.

The March 1-19 poll was based on responses from 128 member companies.

The survey found the most

improved expectation was for capital spending, with 48 percent of the CEOs seeing increases, a 16 percentage point gain from the fourth quarter.

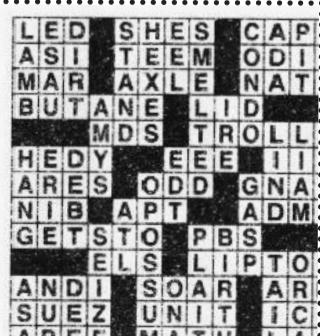
Higher sales were seen by 81 percent of the respondents, up 12 points from the prior quarter.

Hiring expectations improved, albeit more modestly. Forty-two percent of CEOs expected to increase employment, up seven points from the fourth quarter.

Daily Exchange Rates				
Current as of 3/28/2012	Currency Code	Buying rate banknotes	Buying Cheques	Selling Rate
U.S.A.	USD	1.77	1.78	1.80
Dutch Antilles	ANG	0.98	1.00	1.002
Canada	CAD	1.770	1.790	1.810
Britain	GBP	2.770	2.820	2.880
Switzerland	CHF	1.9678	1.9750	1.9830
Netherlands	EUR	2.3539	2.3754	2.3993
Sweden	SEK	0.2576	0.2648	0.2728
Denmark	DKK	0.3098	0.3170	0.3250
Norway	NOK	0.3025	0.3097	0.3177
Japan	JPY	212.56	214.50	216.66

(per 10,000)

YESTERDAY'S Crossword Answer



Lunch Buffet

Saturday - Sunday

12:00 - 3 p.m.

Dinner

Monday - Sunday

6:00 - 11:00 p.m.

Dutch deficit talks in 'difficult phase'

THE HAGUE (AFP) - Negotiations between the Dutch government and its right-wing parliamentary partner over the country's deficit were suspended Wednesday with officials saying talks had entered a "difficult phase."

Premier Mark Rutte's ruling coalition and the far-right, eurosceptic Party for Freedom (PVV) are meeting in The Hague to hammer out a plan to cut spending in order to meet the EU deficit ceiling of 3.0 percent of gross domestic product under current conditions.

"It is a difficult phase" in talks, a Dutch government official told AFP who asked not to be named. The official refused to give further information on negotiations that have been labelled make-or-break.

Figures by the country's central planning bureau (CPB), on which government depends, showed earlier this

month that the state must save 16 billion euros (\$21 billion) in 2013 to meet EU rules.

The Dutch government was put in an embarrassing spot as the bureau's data showed that the public deficit for 2013 would rise to 4.6 percent of domestic gross product under current conditions.

The figures were a blow to a hard-line Dutch government that has insisted deficit sinners such as Greece keep within the EU's budget deficit rules.

Talks in The Hague are aimed at curbing spending, but are also seen as a litmus test for Rutte's rightwing liberal government consisting of his own party and its coalition partner the Christian Democratic Action (CDA), which with far-right support enjoys a majority in the Dutch parliament.

The talks are expected to continue this morning.

FINANCE BRIEFS...

Toyota says market 'coming back,' boosts Canada output

OTTAWA (AFP) - Japanese car manufacturer Toyota announced Wednesday an increase in production at a Canadian assembly plant, citing optimism for the North American market. The company's Woodstock, Ontario assembly plant will boost production of the Toyota RAV4 sport utility vehicle from 150,000 to 200,000 vehicles, relying on an Can\$80 million investment that will result in 400 new jobs over the coming year, it said in a statement.

*

German inflation slows in March

FRANKFURT, March 28, 2012 (AFP) - Inflation in Germany, the eurozone's biggest economy, slowed in March, preliminary official data showed on Wednesday. The consumer price index rose 2.1 percent on a 12-month basis in March, slower than the 2.3 percent recorded in February, the national statistics office Destatis said in a statement. On a monthly basis, the cost of living in Germany rose by 0.3 percent in March from February. Spain likely to need bailout this year: Citi

*

Spain likely to need bailout this year: Citi

Madrid (AFP) - Spain will likely need emergency help from international lenders this year to shore up its banks and public finances, a leading economist at major financial group Citi said on Wednesday. "Spain looks likely to enter some form of a troika programme this year" as a condition for the European Central Bank to keep supporting it by lending to it on favourable terms, Citi's chief economist Willem Buiter said in a note. The "troika" refers to the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, which jointly provided funds to Greece, Ireland and Portugal to save them from financial collapse.

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Susan Boyle takes to stage in new musical of her life



NEWCASTLE (AFP) - Scottish singer Susan Boyle made a triumphant return to the British stage Tuesday at the premiere of a musical charting her rise from humble church volunteer to global superstar.

Wearing a glittering red dress, the 50-year-old received several standing ovations as she sang her signature tune, "I Dreamed A Dream", at the opening night of the musical of the same name in Newcastle, northeastern England.

"We love you," shouted out a member of the audience.

"I love you too -- see me outside," replied Boyle, dis-

playing the cheeky sense of humour that has won her millions of fans, some of whom had travelled from as far as Australia and the United States to attend the premiere.

Before this week, Boyle had not performed in public in Britain since singing for the pope in September 2010. Her two-song set after the musical ended left the Theatre Royal buzzing with excitement.

It is three years since Boyle, a devout Catholic, single and living on welfare in the small village of Blackburn, near the Scottish capital Edinburgh, became an overnight star.

It started when footage of her audition for a British television talent show went viral on the Internet.

In the video, the audience and the judges snigger as Boyle, looking dishevelled and more than a little eccentric steps on to the stage.

Then she opens her mouth to sing "I Dreamed A Dream", the hit from "Les Miserables" -- and that was when her life

changed.

The footage has since received about 500 million hits on YouTube, according to the musical's producers. And she has gone on to record three albums that have sold more than 16 million copies worldwide.

The new musical is based on Boyle's autobiography, "The Woman I was Born to Be". It follows her from birth, when she was deprived of oxygen, through school when she was bullied for her learning difficulties, to the years spent caring for her mother.

The scene of her breakthrough moment at the audition had the theatre audience cheering and whooping. But they fell quiet as the tale turned to the intrusion of the press and her near-breakdown when she lost the talent show final.

The story is told as if Boyle is narrating it, with her memories revealed like dreams, full of laughter, dancing, music and the love of her large family, as well as heartache at the deaths of her beloved parents and sister.

Jane Fonda to play Nancy Reagan in US film: report



file photos: Jane Fonda and Nancy Reagan

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Actress Jane Fonda, a lightning rod for US conservatives since her controversial anti-Vietnam War activism, will be playing the wife of former US president Ronald Reagan, a Republican icon.

Variety magazine reported this week that director Lee Daniels had tapped Fonda to play former first lady Nancy Reagan in an "all-star ensemble" being recruited for a film about a butler who served US presidents from 1952 to 1986.

Forest Whitaker is reportedly close to signing a deal to play the butler and talk show queen Oprah Winfrey is in talks to play his wife, Variety said.

Liam Neeson is being considered for the role of Vietnam-era president Lyndon

Johnson, while John Cusack could play president Richard Nixon, it said.

Fonda, 74, was a staunch opponent of the Vietnam War, and in 1972 she visited Hanoi and was photographed sitting on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft battery, sparking controversy and earning her the nickname "Hanoi Jane."

In recent years she has expressed regret over the incident, but many US conservatives still despise her, arguing she betrayed American troops.

Conversely, president Reagan, who served from 1980-1988, has come to be seen as a paragon of conservatism, with the 2012 Republican presidential candidates repeatedly invoking his name on the campaign trail.

'Homophobic' Jamaican reggae star's gig cancelled in Sweden

STOCKHOLM (AFP) - Jamaican reggae star Sizzla Kalonji had a Stockholm concert cancelled for a second time Wednesday amid protests over lyrics considered homophobic, the club he had been meant to perform at said.

"We are cancelling Sizzla's concert tonight, March 28, at Slakthuset (The Slaughterhouse) despite the fact that this will entail a financial loss for us," Slakthuset said in a statement, insisting "we are against racism, we are against sexism and we are against homophobia."

Sizzla had originally been scheduled to play at another Stockholm club, Strand, but the event was cancelled and moved to Slakthuset after gay rights activists staged protests, including on Facebook.

According to the Swedish

Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL), the singer "regularly persecutes homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people and contributes heavily to the already strongly homophobic and transphobic societal climate in for instance Jamaica."

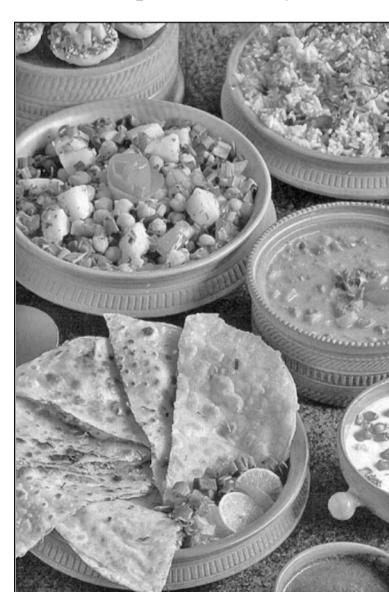
According to the group, which issued a statement earlier Wednesday calling for a boycott of Sizzla's gig at Slakthuset, the singer called at a concert in Kingston this month for the murder of homosexuals.

Organisers behind his four-week European tour meanwhile insisted in a statement published Monday that protesters were reacting to "words in Jamaican that were poorly interpreted and poorly translated."

Richard Svahn, the head of RFSL's Stockholm division, however insisted it was important that Sizzla be blocked from performing in the Swedish capital.

"Stockholm usually ranks first in terms of the world's most gay-friendly cities. For that to continue, organisers must take their responsibility and take a stand up against homophobic artists," he said in the statement.

The Stockholm announcement came a day after the Sala Arena in Madrid said it was cancelling Sizzla's concert there on April 13, and after organisers in Oslo, where he is scheduled to play on Thursday, said the venue for the concert had been altered, also amid protests from gay rights activists.



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Landmark Amsterdam museums get 21st-century facelifts



One of the Rijksmuseum's new additions is its Asian Pavilion - already dubbed affectionately the "jewel box"



Stedelijk Museum, once reopened, will house one of the five most important collections of modern and contemporary art



Amsterdam's Maritime Museum has attracted some 250,000 visitors since it was reopened last October.

AMSTERDAM (AFP) - A virtual adventure at sea with storms and battles, a new "jewel box" for Asian art and a high-tech building shaped like a bathtub: Amsterdam's landmark museums are getting facelifts to catapult them from their dusty pasts into the 21st century.

The makeover of three of the capital's most important museums, the Maritime Museum, the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum, has been hailed as the dawn of a "new cultural golden age" to attract the 12.2 million visitors to Amsterdam every year.

At the recently reopened National Maritime Museum in the grand white 17th-century Zeemagazijn (sea storehouse) building, excited children and their parents lined up for an experience spiced with interactive computer games and

electronic simulations.

Closed to the public in January 2007 for a makeover costing 75.5 million euros (\$99 million), the museum has attracted some 250,000 visitors since it was reopened last October by Dutch monarch Queen Beatrix.

Built on thousands of stilts in Amsterdam's IJ River, the building, which was completed in 1658, stands as a monument to the 17th-century Golden Age of Dutch maritime achievements.

As well as the life-size replica of an 18th-century Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) sailing ship -- its main attraction since 1990 -- it now boasts an arsenal of the latest space-aged gadgets to wow a generation more used to iPads than ancient sea charts.

One of its biggest attractions is the "Voyage at Sea"

where visitors can "meet" 17th-century Dutch admiral Michiel de Ruyter, experience terrifying waves on the high seas and even join a battle with pirates in a virtual simulation.

Across the capital, on the famous Museumplein (Museum Plaza), the stately Rijksmuseum's main building has been closed for renovations costing 375 million euros since 2003.

Work crews are furiously labouring to have the country's best-known museum -- home of famous Dutch Old Master paintings like Rembrandt's "Night Watch" -- ready for its grand reopening in spring next year.

The interior of the main building became more crowded with double ceilings, partitions, climate control installations and offices.

One of the Rijksmuseum's new additions is its Asian Pavilion -- already dubbed affectionately the "jewel box" -- of eastern art treasures, a modern glass and grey stone structure designed to blend with the museum's original building opened in 1885.

The new free-standing Asian Pavilion next to the museum will house a collection dating as far back as 2000 BC and will have 365 different objects on display -- one for every day of the year.

A short walk along Museumplein brings visitors to yet another construction site at the city's Stedelijk Museum.

Closed since 2003, the building will house one of the five most important collections of modern and contemporary art including major works by Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol.

This museum too, which partially reopened in 2010-2011, but closed again in October for final a renovation, has undergone some radical changes to cope with 21st century demands, including an anticipated 500,000 visitors per year.

Its old building, which opened in 1895, is being completely revamped.

And a new addition in the form of a building shaped like an angular bathtub has been added at a total cost of 120 million. Its grand opening is expected in autumn this year.

This includes changing the entrance to face the Museum Plaza as opposed to the previous entrance, which was from a side street.

The Netherlands' last golden age was back in the 17th century, when the Netherlands enjoyed a time of great economic prosperity and cultural importance.

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Pope Benedict XVI met with Fidel Castro: Vatican



HAVANA (AFP) - Pope Benedict XVI met with Cuba's revolutionary icon Fidel Castro Wednesday, the last day of a trip to bolster the Roman Catholic church's relationship with the Communist government, a Vatican spokesman said.

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi at confirmed that the two leaders had met, for about 30 minutes at the Papal Nuncio's residence in Havana.

The spokesman did not immediately detail what they discussed, but said it was the first meeting for the pontiff and the aging revolutionary, who is 85.

On Tuesday, Benedict, 84, met with Fidel's brother, President Raul Castro, 80, who assumed power in 2006 when Fidel stepped aside during a health crisis after ruling the communist island for nearly five decades.

Last week, Benedict said Marxism "no longer corresponds to reality," and argued that Cuba could be helped by looking at new models.

Tuesday the pontiff's calls for openness prompted Cuban Vice President Marino Murillo to rule out any political opening.

"In Cuba, there will be no political reforms," Murillo, who is in charge of carrying out the economic reform program ordered over the past few years by President Raul Castro, told reporters.

"What we are talking about is an updating of our Cuban economic model, which makes our own form of socialism more sustainable, for the well-being of our people," he said.

Catholics account for just about 10 percent of Cuba's population of about 11 million. The church nonetheless has emerged as the most important non-state actor in Cuba, even mediating the release of prisoners.

The pope -- leader of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics -- is seeking to bolster the Church's relationship with Cuban authorities, and to encourage new and renewed faith in the mainly secular island nation.



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TUESDAY AND FRIDAY: LIVE MUSIC

SPORTS

Tennis: Radwanska downs Venus to reach Miami semis



Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland in action during her match against Venus Williams

MIAMI (AFP) - Agnieszka Radwanska brought Venus Williams' comeback event to a halt on Wednesday, downing the American 6-4, 6-1 to reach the semi-finals of the Miami hardcourt tennis tournament.

Radwanska, ranked fourth in the world and seeded fifth, next faces either world number one Victoria Azarenka of Belarus or French seventh seed Marion Bartoli for a place in the final.

The 23-year-old from Poland reached the semi-finals here for the first time, after reaching the quarter-finals each of the past two years.

She needed 1 hour 21 minutes to overcome Williams, who was playing her first WTA tournament in more than

six months after her abrupt withdrawal from the second round of the US Open, where she revealed she had been diagnosed with the auto-immune disorder Sjogren syndrome.

Williams appeared to be feeling the effects of playing three three-set matches between Friday and Monday, but insisted her fitness level was fine.

"I don't have a condition problem, let's definitely get that straight," she said. "I'm always fit."

She admitted, however, that it was frustrating not to be able to execute all elements of her game as well as she'd like.

"I think out of all the matches, today was probably the one where I had the least

pressure in terms of someone who was going to maybe hit winners on me or pressure me.

"So it was disappointing not to be able to feel my best today," she said. "I was able to keep it close in the first set and try different strategies, but it was definitely a mental battle, and today I didn't conquer the mental part of it."

Even so, Williams was pleased to have made it so far in her first tournament back.

"It's been a great tournament," said the American, who is scheduled to play in Charleston next week. "I'm obviously disappointed -- would have liked to have gone further, but, it's a great start."

Williams, 31, is hoping to raise her world ranking high enough to allow her to compete at the London Olympics.

Currently 134th in the world, she is projected to move up to around 90th when the new rankings are released on Monday thanks to reaching the quarter-finals here.

The top 56 in the world as of early June are eligible for direct entry into the Olympic tournament, which will be held at Wimbledon.

"Today is a big move for me," Williams said. "The clay will be a lot slower, so I'm going to have to play smart and patiently, you know, get some wins. We'll see."

In the Men section British fourth seed Andy Murray advanced to the semi-finals of the \$9.6 million ATP and WTA hardcourt tournament on Wednesday by defeating Serb Janko Tipsarevic 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Murray will next face either sixth seeded Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga or world number two Rafael Nadal of Spain.

Football: Barca held by Milan, Bayern cruise



PARIS (AFP) - A superb defensive display by AC Milan saw them draw 0-0 with holders Barcelona on Wednesday while four-time winners Bayern Munich took a giant step towards the Champions League semi-finals with a 2-0 away win over Marseille.

Milan's defence will have to produce a repeat performance against Barca next Tuesday and hope for an away goal of their own if they are to progress and face either Chelsea or Benfica in the semi-finals - the English side lead 1-0 after Tuesday's first leg.

Bayern by contrast can all but look towards the semi-finals - where they are likely to play Real Madrid as the nine-time champions beat APOEL Nicosia 3-0 away on Tuesday - after goals by Mario Gomez, his 11th of the campaign, and Arjen Robben edged them ever closer to the final which is being hosted at their stadium.

The results on Wednesday created a bit of history as it is the first time since it turned into the Champions League that none of the home sides in the quarter-final first legs have managed to score.

Chances were at a premium in Milan as the grizzled veterans such as Clarence Seedorf and Alessandro Nesta once again showed that the legs may get older but that class never goes away in denying Lionel Messi and his fellow stars from scoring.

Indeed Milan spurned the clearest chance as Brazilian star Robinho skied the ball over the bar from a few yards out in the opening minutes.

Barca appealed for a first-half penalty when Milan 'keeper Christian Abbiati clearly made contact with Chilean forward Alexis Sanchez - though the attacker had no chance of recuperating the ball - but Swedish referee Jonas Eriksson turned them down.

Bayern Munich's win condemned Marseille to an eighth defeat in nine matches.

With Steve Mandanda suspended, Marseille coach Didier Deschamps chose to field third-choice goalkeeper Elington Andrade but the move backfired in the 44th minute when the Brazilian allowed Gomez's shot to slip beneath him.

The 32-year-old was making his first appearance since January 2011 and he was beaten again by Robben in the 69th minute as Bayern took a commanding grip on the tie ahead of next Tuesday's return leg.

Heynckes, though, was less happy with the fact that German international midfield powerhouse Bastian Schweinsteiger picked up a booking that sees him suspended for the second leg.

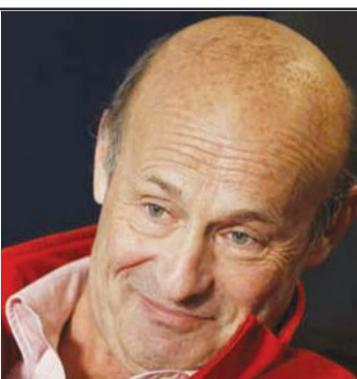
It was a sixth consecutive success for Bayern, and defeat will have done nothing to sweeten the sour mood of the Marseille fans.

Having seen their team beaten seven times in succession prior to Saturday's 1-1 draw at Nice, OM's fans unfurled several protest banners ahead of kick-off, including one that read: "Deschamps and your players, get lost!"

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Baseball: Ex-NBA star buys Dodgers for record \$2bln



file photos - Magic Johnson and Stan Kasten a longtime baseball executive are part of The new Dodgers ownership team.

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - A group led by NBA legend Magic Johnson won an auction for Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers on Tuesday night with a record \$2 billion bid, the bankrupt baseball club announced.

The purchase price from current owner Frank McCourt is the highest sum ever paid for a North American sports franchise and does not include iconic Dodger Stadium, which went for \$150 million in another deal.

Johnson led the Los Angeles Lakers to five NBA titles before his retirement in 1991 after announcing he was HIV-positive. He made brief comebacks, one as coach of the Lakers, before becoming a successful businessman.

"I am thrilled to be part of

the historic Dodger franchise and intend to build on the fantastic foundation laid by Frank McCourt as we drive the Dodgers back to the front page of the sports section," Johnson said.

Johnson has been the major figure in new ownership group Guggenheim Baseball Management LLC, which will create affiliates to form a joint venture with McCourt to obtain the parking lots and property around the stadium for another \$150 million, bringing the full payout by the winning group to \$2.3 billion.

Two losing final bidders in the auction included Stan Kroenke, owner of the National Football League's St. Louis Rams, and a group that included agent Arn Tellem and billionaires Steven Cohen and Patrick Soon-Shiong.

The Dodgers entered bankruptcy last June after Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig refused to approve a \$3 billion television rights fee extension between the Dodgers and Fox.

Selig said he was concerned the income from the sale would go to satisfy the personal debts of McCourt, who was embroiled in a bitter di-

vorce from ex-wife Jamie at the time, and be removed from the Dodgers, giving them a major competitive disadvantage.

McCourt and Major League Baseball reached a settlement deal overseen by a bankruptcy court that gave him until next Sunday to identify a winning bidder for the Dodgers and until April 30 to close the deal.

McCourt must pay Jamie McCourt a divorce settlement of \$131 million on April 30.

"This transaction underscores the debtors' objective to maximize the value of their estate and to emerge from Chapter 11 under a successful Plan of Reorganization, under which all creditors are paid in full," the Dodgers said in a statement.

McCourt bought the Dodgers in 2004 from Fox for \$371 million plus a \$50 million infusion of operating funds to the club.

"This agreement with Guggenheim reflects both the strength and future potential of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and assures that the Dodgers will have new ownership with deep local roots, which bodes well for the Dodgers," McCourt said in a statement.

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Baseball: Igawa home after disastrous Yankee years

TOKYO (AFP) - One of Japan's costliest ever baseball exports returned home on Wednesday, cutting a disappointed figure less than five years after signing a \$46 million deal with the New York Yankees.

Kei Igawa, whose dismal showing with the Yankees made him among the star-studded team's biggest flops, joined Japan's Orix Buffaloes after failing to find a US major league team willing to hire him.

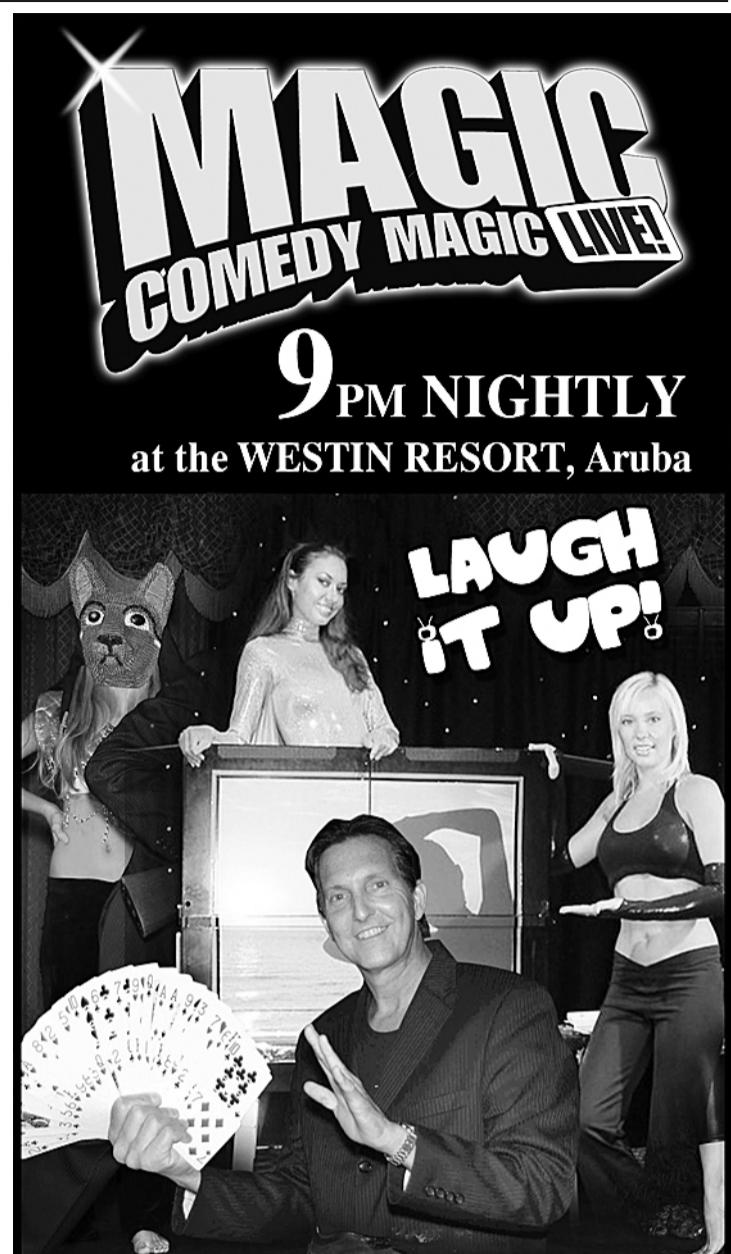
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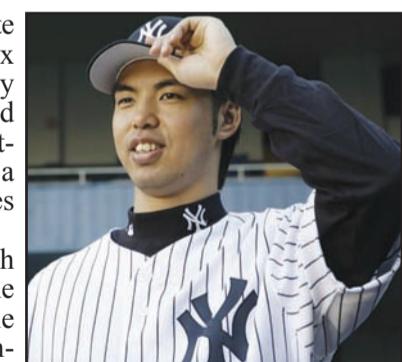
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"I would like to contribute to the victory of the Orix after calling a halt to my challenge in the United States," the 32-year-old left-handed pitcher, who was a free agent after the Yankees cut him, wrote on his blog.

Igawa, a former star with the Hanshin Tigers, became a Japanese hero when he signed for the iconic Yankees, but was credited as a winning pitcher in only two games before being relegated to the farm system.

"I have been training on my own and I am in good physical condition. I want to regain my old form and stand on the pitcher's mound as

soon as possible," Igawa wrote.

His ignominious return comes just two months after fellow Japanese pitcher Yu Darvish signed a \$56 million, six-year deal with the Texas Rangers.

Baseball: Mariners beat Athletics 3-1 in MLB opener

TOKYO (AFP) - Infielder Dustin Ackley fired a game-winning hit to give Seattle Mariners a 3-1 win over Oakland Athletics in the opener of the US Major League Baseball at the

The Athletics only managed to equalise 1-1 at the bottom of the fourth inning through a double by catcher Kurt Suzuki to get Cliff Pennington back.

Mariners starter Felix



US Major League baseball team Seattle Mariners outfielder Ichiro Suzuki dives to first base in the 4th inning of the MLB 2012 Opening Series in Japan against Oakland Athletics in Tokyo on March 28, 2012. Athletics and Seattle Mariners are here to participate in the 2012 MLB Opening Series in Japan, March 28 and 29, 2012.

AFP PHOTO



Short stop Brendan Ryan (R) attempts to steal second base while Oakland Athletics short stop Cliff Pennington (L) watches in the third inning of the MLB 2012 Opening Series in Japan, in Tokyo on Wednesday.

AFP PHOTO

Tokyo Dome on Wednesday. Ackley, who also hit a home run off starter Brandon McCarthy to take a 1-0 lead in the fourth inning, sent a single to toe centre field to get Brendan Ryan back, who was on the third base, for a 2-1 lead in the 11th inning.

Japan's star outfielder Ichiro Suzuki added another run with his fourth hit of the day to receive Ackley from the second base.

Hernandez pitched eight innings of one-run ball.

"The first thing I thought after I got back to the dug out was that I'm the leader of the major league's home run. It's the first time in my life," said second baseman Ackley.

It was the Mariners' fifth extra-inning affair on opening day and the first since 1996 with their record now four wins against one defeat in five games.

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Sanctioned Syrians not welcome at Olympics: British PM



LONDON (AFP) - Syrian regime members targeted by EU sanctions will not be welcome at the London Olympic Games, Britain's premier said Wednesday, though the country's athletes will be allowed to participate.

"I don't think we should punish the athletes for the sins of the regime, so Syrian athletes will be taking part in the Games," Prime Minister David Cameron said at a joint press conference with Olympics chief Jacques Rogge.

"But let's be absolutely clear -- Britain has led efforts within the European Union and elsewhere to institute asset bans, travel freezes and punishing sanctions against this despicable regime."

"Anyone covered by one of those travel bans will not be welcome in London,"

Cameron said, as a team from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) arrived for a three-day final inspection of preparations for the 2012 Games.

It was not immediately clear whether any Syrian officials intending to attend the Olympics are covered by sanctions.

The IOC formally invited Syria to attend the Games last July but the body is monitoring Syria's status, Pere Miro, the IOC's director of national Olympic committee relations, said earlier this month.

A Syrian presence is set to cause controversy at the

Games, which open in the British capital on July 27, amid an ongoing crackdown in Syria on a year-long revolt against President Bashar Al-Assad.

Monitors say almost 10,000 people have died in the violence.

Assad's wife Asma, who grew up in Britain, was among 12 people targeted last Friday by an EU-wide travel ban and asset freeze, which also included the president's mother, sister and sister-in-law.

Foreign Secretary William Hague said that since the Syrian first lady holds a British passport she cannot be barred from entering Britain, but he did not expect her to try under the circumstances.

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